

Executive Summary

“Six Secrets of Top Performers”

This article, written by John Finney, appeared in the May/June 2008 issue of *Communication World* to illustrate the power of good communication and how it can influence a company. This following summary will identify the six secrets of top companies and explain how each secret helps a business become so successful and enables a company to become highly effective.

Secret 1: Focusing on the Customer

Customer focus is the “key driver of employee engagement” (Finney 23). Everyone in the organization needs to have his or her focus on the customer. The more a company focuses on its customers, the better the company does. Many companies are now using new approaches to keep all their employees up-to-date on how a customer feels about the company. For example, some companies are handing out briefing reports every quarter to indicate the performance of the company so that the employees can understand how the customer is feeling and discuss, with their managers or supervisors, different changes that are needed to better their services to their customers.

Secret 2: Engaging Employees in Running the Business

Companies listed as highly effective almost always encourage two-way communication. The better the managers and employees communicate the more successful the company will become. Highly effective companies are “nearly 10 times as likely as less effective companies to provide input into decisions that affect them” (Finney 24). By gathering employee input a company can understand what changes need to be made. In addition, employees who know their input is valued will feel more confident, and therefore, put forth more effort into the company.

Secret 3: Improving Managerial Communication

A company with great managers has a better chance of success than a company with average managers. Highly effective companies provide their managers with training that helps to improve their communication skills as well as ways to become more alert and effectual. Some companies have developed training facilities online making it easier and more convenient for its managers to access. The easier it is for managers to access the training the more likely they will take the actual initiative to learn the new skills.

Secret 4: Managing Change Effectively

Change is sometimes difficult for companies to endure. Highly effective companies who use internal communicators are “twice as likely as less effective companies to implement a communication initiative to support change” (Finney 25). Companies need their employees to be open to change and to know how to deal with the pressures that may come

along with the change. Allowing managers to provide the employees with their knowledge, of the coming changes in the company, will help to boost the managers morale and superiority while the lower level employees will feel that they are also important enough to be notified of the changes.

One company started preparing its employees for change almost a year in advance. As the change neared the company distributed newsletters, surveys, and new ads to raise awareness of the new program the company was going to adopt. By preparing its employees for the new changes and including them in the process, the company's new program was a huge success.

Secret 5: Measuring Communication Effectiveness

Measuring the impact of communication effectiveness in a business is important, especially, to ensure the company is functioning at its best. The employees within a company need to be communicating with one another even in different levels of management to maintain workforce productivity. Highly effective companies measure employee engagement, business performance, retention of critical talent, workforce productivity, and strategic business goals. Measuring even the current activities in a company will help maintain a company's effectiveness.

Secret 6: Establishing a Compelling Employer Brand

The employer brand, the company image as perceived by the employees, is similar to the external business brand and just as important, if not more. The employer brand identifies to the public what the company is all about. A company needs to be sure its employees are proud of the company. Companies need to provide employees with the purpose and goals of the company, and engage them. Employees who are better informed about the company will help to strengthen the employer brand.

Overall Evaluation

I believe this article certainly identifies what it takes to become a top performing business. The article mentions how some people argue that we cannot measure the impact of communication on the bottom line and I have to disagree. Communication truly is the most important aspect in a business. Without communication a business would not be able to function due to its lack of direction and management. The six secrets listed in the article are the exact reasons why some companies are so highly effective. They understand it takes everyone in an organization, from managers to technical specialist to customers, in order to make a business successful.

Work Cited

Finney, John. "Six Secrets of Top Performers." Communication World (May/Jun. 2008): 23-27. Communication and Mass Media Complete. Texas Christian University Lib., Forth Worth, TX. 18 Sept. 2008 <<http://web.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu>>.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“R U Ready for IM?”

The article “R U Ready for IM?” published in the May 2007 issue of *The Information Management Journal* discusses the pros and cons of Instant Messaging (IM) in the workplace. It was written by Jesse Wilkins, CDIA+, principal consultant with Access Sciences Corporation, a RIM consulting firm based in Houston, Texas. Research In Motion (RIM) is a leading designer, manufacturer, and marketer of innovative wireless solutions for the worldwide mobile communications market.

RIM provides platforms and solutions for seamless access to time-sensitive information including email, phone, text messaging, and Internet based applications through the development of integrated hardware, software, and services.

STRENGTHS

According to AOL’s Third Annual Instant Messenger Survey in 2005, instant messaging is up 19 percent annually. 77 percent of at-work IM users report that IM has a positive impact on their work lives as they use it to communicate with colleagues, get a quick answer on a business matter, and communicate with clients or customers.

Wilkins feels that IM can significantly increase employee productivity “...from enabling collaboration to easing the strain of the overloaded e-mail inbox, if it is managed effectively” (Wilkins 28). To take advantage of instant messaging’s benefits and overcome its challenges, organizations must implement processes and technologies to manage it effectively.

WEAKNESSES

Employees’ inappropriate use of IM presents a challenge in the workplace. Use of cryptic abbreviations such as TTYL (talk to you later) or IMHO (in my humble opinion), emoticons (smileys), and account names (handles) such as “flirt69”, can reflect lack of professionalism. Moreover, employees may spend valuable work time chatting with other people using the same chat application.

Perhaps the single biggest problem posed by instant messaging in the work place is the ability to retain IM history. Instant messages should be archived according to the content of the message the same way as e-mail, word processing documents, or paper records. History is generally stored either by user, conversation, or day, meaning that there may be thousands of files to review in the event it becomes necessary to do so. In the United States alone there are over 10,000 laws and regulations related to electronic messaging and records retention. The more well-known of these include the Sarbanes-Oxley Act.

OPPORTUNITIES

Companies’ choosing to ignore or deny their employees the freedom or ability to use instant messaging opens the door for those employees to download applications, and can

lead to exposure of the company's computers to viruses and spyware. According to a survey from the American Management Association and the ePolicy Institute, 50 percent of workers are downloading and installing free IM tools, but only 31 percent of organizations have a policy on IM in place.

A better approach to taking control of IM starts with updating information management policies.... "An effective IM policy should contain guidance similar to other communications policies... The policy should identify topics that are off-limits, whether because the content is unprofessional or because it is too sensitive for IM" (Wilkins 30).

In this article, Jesse Wilkins divides organizations into categories based on their IM usage in the workplace. They are as follows:

- **Ignorance.** The organization does not know about IM or believes that its employees do not use or need IM, perhaps even viewing it as something only teenagers use. This is probably the most dangerous phase as it poses the threat of introducing viruses to the organization by unwary IM users.
- **Denial.** The organization realizes that IM is present and available but denies its employees to use it for reasons including risk of exposure to viruses, wasted time using it, and problems with regulatory compliance.
- **Acceptance.** The organization makes efforts to take control of IM usage through policies and procedures. Companies may also standardize on a single network.
- **Optimization.** This stage involves incorporating IM into existing business processes and even optimizing current processes around IM's functionality.

EVALUATION

I feel it is important that we embrace the efficiency of IM. The librarians at the McDermott Library have already begun to use IM to communicate with students, faculty, and other librarians. Yesterday, I was able to speak with Joe, a librarian at UT Austin, via IM. He told me that the librarians there use it to communicate frequently. He said, "...our service is very popular with those who use it. People leave us really appreciative comments...." When I asked him if he felt people wasted time chatting about non-work related things via IM, his personal opinion was that people are going to find a way to waste time, whether catching up at the water cooler, talking on the phone, or IMing each other. So he does not think that IM is better or worse in that regard.

While instant messaging can be utilized as a highly efficient and effective work tool, it is not without its faults. In a work setting, guidelines need to be put into place in an effort to keep it professional. The ability to archive messages is another drawback. However, if organizations' demand for use of IM as a tool increases, I am sure that the supply of these capabilities will become available.

Work Cited

Wilkins, Jesse. "R U Ready for IM?" The Information Management Journal (May/June 2007): 26-31.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Look Who’s Talking”

The article, “Look Who’s Talking” was published by Across the Board. It was written by James Krohe Jr. in July of 2004. Mr. Krohe is a Chicago-area writer, editor, and a veteran commentator on Illinois public issues. The purpose of this article is to highlight the changes in the corporate speaking circuit by discussing the following:

- New voices and topics
- New audience
- New set of corporate speaking rules

New Voices and Topics

Speeches on the corporate speaking circuit used to be predictable. One could expect to hear sermons on success, how-to’s for management, and addresses from jocks to excite the audience. In some cases, the tactics are still being used today. However, as the world changes, so does corporate speaking. Motivational speakers used to say anything is possible if you *believe* it. Now, they suggest that failure is unavoidable. Positive thinking has changed into a learn-from-mistakes attitude. People still love listening to heroes, but even they have changed. We used to mainly consider people in uniform heroes. Today, increasing number of non-uniformed heroes take the podium such as health gurus, former diplomats, and even people that have overcome a disability.

The culture of corporate speaking has changed. Once, it was a norm for a typical jock, who is not an accomplished speaker, to take the podium and lecture executives about success. His fame and success in sports was sufficient qualification. Lately, the process of picking a speaker has become professionalized and now an important aspect of event planning. Customers now expect proof of a speaker’s charm and dynamisms. Mr. Krohe emphasizes this by saying, “Event planners exercise more diligence in vetting a speaker than many firms do in making a new acquisition—less because they want to get the full value of the speaker’s fee than because they want to get the full value of the audience’s time” (Krohe 7).

A strong connection exists between corporate speaking and major social trends. A century ago abolitionism, suffrage, and universal education was important. Today, terrorism, globalization, trade, and culture clashes in marketplace play a key role. New speakers result in new topics.

New Audience

The audience was once mostly made up of men. Speakers and topics had to appeal to a male audience. Today’s audience is more diverse. Management hierarchies are now in favor of more dispersed authority. Instead of only top management being aware of how the company is run, today everyone knows. In most cases, expert advice is necessary and is being delivered to a variety of audiences, not just the executives. Also, women are a

large part of the audience today and there is a steady increase in the number of women on platforms. Because most of the high-level businesspeople are male, that's what the audience still prefers and that's where the demand is. Another reason why the audience has changed is because top-level management also needs motivation sometimes. As Mr. Krohe writes, "The audience needing motivation has changed too. Motivational messages that once were valued by the nobodies as ways to build career are being embraced by the nabobs as base for building a company" (Krohe 2).

New Set of Corporate Speaking Rules

Today corporate speakers cannot just be famous. He or she must be able to communicate his or her point of view with the audience effectively. In addition, the speaker needs to be an expert at the topics that he or she discusses. He or she must be able to create unique and innovative topics that reflect the aspects of the subject and which have direct connection with the audience. Basically, he/she must be a "hot speaker" who has extended knowledge of the subject, be prepared, and be professional.

Significance/Value to Business Communication

This article highlights the changes that occurred in business communication over the last few years. It shows the significance of communication in business and how it's related to the world. The article also shows that speakers, topics, and audiences in communication change and that they are not set in stone. I think it is important to note that the cultural changes influence changes in communication. Communication is just a tool used by the people. As people change their ways, communication changes follow. This article also emphasizes how vital it is to be professional while communicating. By reading this article, one can see how critical communication is especially in business. Communication in business is more than just speaking and listening; a company's success may depend on how well the speaker can deliver the message. I think this article is a great illustration of the important points that we have discussed in class about business communication. It's the lecture becoming alive. This article is pure proof that what we have learned in class can really be put in use in the business world.

Work Cited

Krohe Jr., James. "Look Who's Talking. (cover story)." Across the Board 41.4 (July 2004): 34-41. Business Source Complete. EBSCO. [McDermott], [Richardson], [TX]. 23 Sep. 2008 <<http://search.ebscohost.com.libproxy.utdallas.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=13743410&site=ehost-live>>.